Thank you Martin and Yi Sheng.

Good afternoon to the guest of honor, my fellow schoolmates, staff and faculty, family and friends. My name is Edwin, and it is my honor to be standing here today to address all of you on behalf of the graduating class of MITB.

To all of you who have worked hard on your degree, congratulations.

I struggled for a long time, trying to figure out what to say. What can I offer to a room full of graduates with bright futures ahead of you? After much thought, I’ve decided there are 2 things that I would like to share today, and in order to do that, I’ll start off by going back 12 years in time to 2003.

I started my journey as the pioneer batch of SIS at the Bukit Timah campus. We were then a small class of less than 90 students. This was a time where we had the luxury of owning our own GSR rooms in the then Raffles Building, much to the envy of students from the other schools. Being the most senior class meant that there were absolutely no traditions to follow, there were no guidelines on how a lot of things were supposed to be done, and everything had to be started from scratch; it was a great environment to be “entrepreneurs”.

From what I understand, the SIS workload has not changed much. Back in the day, SIS already had the reputation of being the school with the heaviest workloads: we too started cracking on our IS projects within the first 2 weeks of each term; when crunch time came and there was just way too much project work to be completed, many of us ended up staying overnight and worked over weekends just to meet datelines, stories of which I’m sure everyone here is familiar with. I remember bugging our trusty Yeow Leong and Kar Way for help when I hit roadblocks on projects, and they always provided the assistance needed to make it through. Thank you, Yeow Leong and Kar Way, for spending the time and effort to guide me in my times of need.

Despite the hard times, this was also the best time of my life. I made a lot of life-long friends, was part of the organising committee for brand new university events, and tried the various activities made available by the CCAs such as sailing and diving.

As ISM was a brand new and untested degree at that point of time, there was a group of us who thought we needed some insurance in the event the degree didn’t give us sufficient credibility to secure a job – an unfounded worry we quickly found out as the first batch graduated, but a real concern for us as undergraduates – so the group of us applied for double degrees; I applied for the then School of Business, majoring in Operations Management.
The School of Business gave me a whole different set of knowledge, such as Accounting, Finance, Law, and of course the Logistics world. School of Business also gave me a whole new group of friends who work in different industries, whom today I seek council from when I need an expert for a particular field.

Time passed quickly while I was having fun; before I knew it, it was year 4 and time to start applying for jobs. At this point of my life I was still clueless about what I wanted to do, so I followed the crowd and applied for a bank job. I managed to secure a job in the graduate program of a large international bank; it was truly exciting times.

The job provided opportunities to rotate to various departments. Every time I joined a new team, I went in with the mindset of wanting to learn from the veterans, learn about the products, and the processes and the significance of each of them. It was only once I gained the full understanding of the environment that I started proposing changes. A Swiss watch company called Audemars Piguet sums this process up very nicely in their slogan, “To break the rules, you must first master them.”

Through the rotations, I found that there were always skills that were useful: team work, project management, time management, process automation and streamlining, a lot of terms that you all should be familiar with. On top of that, I built up amazing Excel skills, a tool that we worked with in CAT class, and up till today Excel is the single most useful tool in my toolbox.

4.5 years into my job it got comfortable, I knew what was going on and how it all worked, but it also meant that I’ve gotten to a point where I’m stagnant; there was nothing new to learn and work became repetitive. In addition, in my quest to climb the corporate ladder, I worked hard to deliver, but unwittingly had become really good at a job that I had no liking for. The job eventually felt like a drag – I didn’t want to wake up in the morning for work, there was no longer any fire burning in me, I had a lack of passion to perform; it was apparent something had to change.

I started searching for jobs, but realised there were no bank positions that really interested me. But there was something that did, an interest I found from the daily number crunching from my job but yearned to take to a different level, and that was the field of Analytics. The only problem was, I wasn’t qualified for it.

After 6 years at the bank, I finally made up my mind that it was time to leave. It was one of the scariest decisions that I’ve ever had to make, giving up a well-paying job to go study a master degree and not have any income in the meantime. In addition, I know of too many people who finished MBAs and did not generate any sort of benefit from it whatsoever. This meant that there was no guarantee that doing a masters would pay off. Most of the people I spoke to told me that I was very brave to quit my job.

Exactly 10 years since I started my first year at SIS, I started MITB in 2013, I felt reinvigorated: I was back at a place of learning.
Mid-way through the 1-year master’s programme. I applied for a management programme in a Hong Kong trading company called Fung Group. It was a grueling interview process that stretched for months. Many skills picked up from school and work kept coming up over and over again; on top of operational skills, we needed to excel in presentation skills, relationship management, quick thinking and problem solving.

I started my new journey in a completely different industry in July 2014, moving from the fast-paced banking industry to the long lead times clothing industry. But there was another major difference: I moved from a big, red-taped organisation where orders came from the top down and initiatives moved slowly, to a small, entrepreneur setup where there is autonomy to work on interesting projects and there is ample space to make suggestions and swiftly implement them to achieve results. I realised that I loved this entrepreneurial feeling: it was like being back in 2003 as the pioneer batch of SIS.

The management programme gave me opportunities to learn about the trading business in Hong Kong, to work on marketing and CRM for a retail company in China, and to work in almost all departments in a licensing company in London. During each stint, I kept in mind the advice given by my friends in senior positions, be humble, there is always someone smarter or better than you, and coupled with a lesson I’ve learnt over the years, which is to listen before you speak, I’ve been able to build good working relationships in order to deliver tangible results.

Standing here today gives me the feeling I’ve come full circle on a number of things in life.

The entrepreneur environment that SIS had in its formative years turned out to be the environment that I should have been looking to be in at the onset of my job search.

The events I organised as part of my CCA activities turned out to be practical experience for my current job as marketing manager.

A business degree that initially was an insurance policy turned out to be a perfect complement with the IS degree that allowed me to receive a scholarship from the SMU-DHL Green transformation lab for MITB, and a great background to have for working in cross-divisional business roles.

My quest to learn broadly led to the ability to pick up ideas and solutions from other fields and adapt it to mine, and to learn deeply turned out to be a skill that led to mastery.

With this, the 2 things that I want to share with you are:

Firstly: never stop learning! I know this might sound cliché, or like something the profs might say, but continue to enrich yourself. Learn as many things as you can, learn as deeply as you can. You never know how a skill or knowledge might come in useful one day. Sometimes some of these skills may come from doing jobs or working on projects
that you do not like, but this is part of our life journey, we get the good and the bad, what’s important is what we learn out of it.

Secondly: To those still trying to figure out what is it that you want to do, I quote one of my favorite lines from J.R.R Tolkien, the author of Lord of the Rings. He wrote – “Not all those who wander are lost”. Sometimes you need to wander to find what you’re looking for, or maybe it might unexpectedly find you. Go explore and try different things, all of them are at the very least learning journeys and might lead you somewhere you never thought of, as well as to discover new things about yourself.

And I would like to end off this speech by thanking my mum and grandma who are in the audience today, to the 2 ladies who have supported me in every way possible throughout all these years and who have given me all the encouragement for me to have grown into the person I am today. Thank you!